

**Memo**

**Three Memoranda Attached Re Vietnam**

**29 December 1965**

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HELMS

SUBJECT: Three Memoranda Attached Re Vietnam

1. I have asked the boys, on the basis of the bombing pause and press reports of some kind of US contact with the DRV, to think about a number of the possibilities raised if these stories are true. The results, which I attach, are:

(a) A paper outlining current Soviet tactics on Vietnam and how these relate to Moscow's recent maneuvers against China; it concludes that Shelepin in Hanoi will push hard the case for more reliance on diplomacy and politics, less on military means. (Tab A)

(b) A paper thinking about China's attitude toward negotiations and concluding that Peiping will threaten big difficulties whenever it senses a weakening of Hanoi's resolve to continue fighting. (Tab B)

(c) A paper on South Vietnamese attitudes toward negotiations, which concludes that they are largely negative but not insurmountably so. This one was promised to the Director some time ago and has been approved by the Board of National Estimates. (Tab C)

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2. None of these deal with the central question of how Hanoi itself now views its options. Some in this town may be better informed than we on this one; perhaps we'll get some evidence soon.

3. I think you will find all of these papers interesting and hopefully a contribution to your thinking. At least the first two (A and B above) were written with this principally in mind and we do not recommend any further circulation. In a few days we may all know enough more to warrant review, revision, and circulation to a wider audience.

SHEPHERD KENT

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29 December 1965

ONE STAFF MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Shelepin Mission

1. The visit of A.N. Shelepin to Hanoi is the strongest evidence to date that the Soviets are attempting to seize the initiative in the struggle with China for influence over the future of the Vietnamese war. It climaxes several months of Soviet maneuvering to drive a wedge between Hanoi and Peiping. Whether Shelepin can bring off a political triumph is questionable, but the fact that the Soviets and DRV have agreed to this high level visit suggests that the Soviet role in Hanoi is growing.

2. A shift in Soviet tactics toward China and therefore toward Vietnam was signalled in late September, when Brezhnev openly admitted that several months of Soviet restraint and patience has yielded absolutely no results in Sino-Soviet relations. It is now known that at the time of Brezhnev's remark another tedious wrangle had developed over shipments of Soviet war material to Hanoi. During October the Soviets made high level statements on the urgent need of united action on Vietnam and hinted that another Communist conference might be held. At a communist gathering in Prague, the Soviet party secretary Andropov probably tested the reaction of the various Communist representatives. Since then there have been a growing number of rumors, often contradictory,

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over whether the Soviets were in fact pressing ahead with the idea of a meeting on Vietnam. One report has it that Sholepin was assigned the task of finding a way out of the frustrating impasse.

3. Obviously the key questions for Moscow was the attitude of the Vietnamese. A meeting without Vietnam would serve mainly to demonstrate the limits of Moscow's authority and influence. A meeting with the Vietnamese in attendance, however, would be a diplomatic coup. But, of course, the Chinese were certain to stay away and denounce the Russians roundly. In view of this certainty, the Vietnamese would be caught in the middle. It is likely that these pros and cons were rehearsed during an unpublicized visit of the DRV Premier, Pham Van Dong, to Moscow in October. And apparently the Soviets did not give up their ideas.

4. Perhaps nothing would have come of the Soviet plans had it not been for a golden opportunity offered by the Chinese. While the dispute over passage of Soviet equipment to the DRV was growing more critical, the Chinese viciously attacked the Soviets, first in a private letter, and then in public on 11 November. The Russians had the Vietnamese issue out in the open and the Chinese case was far from strong or convincing. The Soviets not only replied in public but counterattacked persuasively that the Chinese were preventing effective and united support for Vietnam. Apparently, the Soviets also continued or revived the idea for a new meeting. The purpose of such a meeting as described by various sources would be first of all to coordinate common lines on Vietnam.

5. The Soviets probably have had two things in mind: first, an offer of substantial bloc-wide aid (possibly even an "international brigade"), and secondly, the creation of a "situation" which would lead to a political solution. As described by the Polish party newspaper in early December, the position was:

It must be our common aim and striving to lead to such a situation in which the American tactics of escalation would break down, and the hopeless attempts to find a military solution would give way in favor of a search for political solution . . .

Thus the Chinese are quite right in characterizing the Soviets as trying to buy influence and decisive control with their military and economic aid (already about \$500 million in the last six months, according to one Soviet source).

6. A confluence of recent events -- the completion of Soviet-DRV economic/military aid negotiations, the Christmas lull, and, above all the pause in US bombings of the DRV -- ~~makes~~ the Shelepin visit particularly crucial not only for the DRV's position between Moscow and Peiping, but for the future of the Vietnamese war. Shelepin probably intended to outline the extent of Soviet and Eastern European physical support available if Chinese obstruction could be surmounted. And he probably meant to try to persuade the North Vietnamese to associate themselves with a Soviet-sponsored meeting on solidarity.

7. But the pause in the bombings probably has changed the nature of Shelepin's instructions. He is now likely to put more emphasis on

the opportunity to explore the political route, on the tactical advantage of responding to any American initiative and leaving open the door to a settlement with a promise of Soviet support if this approach should break down. His argument might run something like this:

if no response is made to the Americans, you are facing a long difficult and costly war with a badly divided alliance; China is determined to split the Communist movement even at the expense of the DRV's war effort; further escalation of the war is inevitable; your present course can only result in a growing American commitment and the postponement of your objectives in the South. On the other hand, political tactics offer not only the possibility of an American withdrawal but an opportunity to consolidate present gains. Moreover, unlike Khrushchev, the present Soviet leaders are committed to long term economic and military aid on a significant level, but this can only be effective if there is a long breathing space in the war. The Americans have made a concession in stopping the bombings, the best tactic is to probe their position thoroughly before facing the dangers of a greatly expanded war.

8. In short, the moment has arrived which the Soviets have been striving for since last February, and it will be up to Shchepin to make the most of it.

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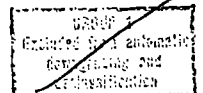
SUBJECT: Vietnam Negotiations: The Chinese Position

Of all the Communist parties at interest, China is the most adamantly and unconditionally opposed to negotiations on Vietnam. This memorandum explores the reasons behind this position and the implications for the prospects of an eventual settlement. It concludes that the Chinese have major long-range reasons for opposing negotiations and considerable leverage to impose this position on the DRV.

The Chinese Rejection of Negotiations

1. Three factors -- China's view of the Vietnamese war, its policy toward the US, and its conflict with the USSR -- operate to form Peking's view about a negotiated settlement.

2. The Vietnamese War. China views this war from the perspective of its own revolution. Having himself fought for 20 years against an enemy which enjoyed enormous advantages at the outset, Mao regards a Communist victory in South Vietnam as certain and is in no great hurry to achieve it. His own





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experience does not exclude negotiations, but purely as another form of struggle and a temporary one at that, to be abandoned when circumstances permit a resumption of fighting.

3. Policy Toward the US. China means to eject the US from Southeast Asia altogether. There is plenty of time, but the defeat must be total. The Chinese view increased US commitments as merely magnifying this eventual defeat; they are serious in claiming to see advantages in bigger US deployments. So long as China itself is not drawn into the war, Peking will prefer to see the struggle continue rather than endorse any "settlement" which provides for a continuing US presence or creates a basis for US re-intervention.

4. Conflict with the USSR. This is the key to China's position on negotiations. Peking is perhaps as concerned to eject the USSR from Indochina as it is to oust the US. Its greatest fear, therefore, is a Soviet-US deal. It sees no virtue in an outcome by which Moscow replaces Washington as China's rival in Vietnam, particularly since, in Peking's view, its two enemies would thereafter act in collusion to block China.

5. China is aware that almost any form of negotiated settlement would perforce involve the USSR and give it a continuing role in Vietnam. Moscow is the Communist channel

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through which the DRV can explore negotiations with the US. The USSR is co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, and even if some new international body were created to bring about or monitor a Vietnamese settlement, it is difficult to imagine that Moscow could be excluded. In the Chinese view, the USSR is interested in negotiations, not in order to eliminate the risks of war, but to gain for itself a permanent foothold in Vietnam.

#### Durability of the Chinese Position

6. These are long-range propositions which, barring a major reversal of Chinese foreign policy, are not likely to change in the next several years. Peking is prepared to wait a long time for a Communist victory in Vietnam. In the meantime, it will work to prevent any settlement which leaves the US in South Vietnam or provides for some form of subsequent international supervision there, in short, any settlement short of unconditional US capitulation.

#### Chinese Leverage in North Vietnam

7. Can Peking make this position stick? Can it prevent negotiations even if Hanoi comes to desire them?

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8. China has several means of leverage. It almost certainly has political assets among the North Vietnamese Communists, and probably in the Viet Cong, who will argue Chinese positions. It can exert a direct squeeze on military and industrial supplies, either by limiting its own shipments or restricting those from the USSR. These are rather blatant means of pressure, but China has proved willing to exercise them by holding up Soviet military aid on several occasions.

9. China derives a potent leverage from the deterrent which it exercises, upon the DRV's behalf, on the US. This factor has been obscured because Peking has regularly reinforced Hanoi's hard line. But surely the North Vietnamese have to consider the possibility that China's deterrent cannot be taken for granted in all circumstances.

10. Should Hanoi move toward negotiations against private Chinese advice, it would not be difficult for Peking to issue a veiled public warning about, say, the dangers of "revisionism" or overestimating the enemy. This would force Hanoi to contemplate the danger of more direct statements dissociating China from the DRV's course and cause. To the North Vietnamese, this would surely threaten not merely to undermine their bargaining power vis-a-vis the US, but gravely to undercut the restraints on US power. They would be bluntly reminded, in effect, that it lay in Peking's power to expose them to the enemy. (They already realize that

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China is able and willing to block Soviet military assistance). At the same time, however, they would see some element of bluff in this, believing that Peking's desire to prevent the establishment of an anti-Communist regime on its Southern border would severely limit its hand.

11. Before resorting to public statements to pressure Hanoi, Peking would first threaten this kind of action in private communications to Hanoi. Its aim would be to exert pressures which would strengthen the policies and positions of the militant members of the Vietnamese leadership. China would hope that the prospect of its active opposition would cause that leadership to adopt positions so demanding as to be unacceptable to the US.

12. We do not know how far Peking would go in this direction, but the chances are good that initial moves of this sort are underway at present. It seems certain that Mao is highly suspicious over Shelepin's visit to Hanoi at a time when the US has suspended its attacks on the DRV. At a minimum, he is making urgent inquiries in Hanoi, and he is probably at the same time making clear Chinese displeasure at the prospect of any understanding with the US.



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29 December 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Vietnam Negotiations: Likely South  
Vietnamese Reactions

PROBLEM AND ASSUMPTION

To consider South Vietnamese attitudes and reactions to possible negotiations with the Communists. We assume a situation in which the Communists retain a significant military capability and in which negotiations would not merely be an acknowledgment of a GVN/US "victory."

SUMMARY

South Vietnamese leaders would fear Communist gains at the negotiating table, and even the negotiating process itself would appear to them as a serious threat to their continued power and independence of action. A key factor would be the maintenance of Saigon's confidence in the US, especially its determination over the long run to prevent a Communist takeover. But almost

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any step the US took toward talks would weaken such confidence. Thus the task of bringing South Vietnam along in negotiations would be difficult and would almost certainly require heavy and sustained US pressures and inducements.

#### I. ATTITUDES TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS

1. The appearance of a definite prospect of negotiations would shift the main focus of attention from military to political matters, and thereby would introduce a new and divisive factor into the situation in South Vietnam. No matter what position the Saigon government adopted in the matter, there would be opposition and some increase in instability. Each of the country's various interest groups would follow its own line, and where positions coincided, it would be more by accident than by design. Even within the various groups there would be divisions as contending elements jockeyed for advantage. In the end, the military would be the group that really counted; as long as it remained unified, the attitudes of other groups would be of secondary importance in determining the GVN's position.

2. Most of the South Vietnamese peasants, who form the majority of the population, are war weary. They would welcome a move to negotiations, hoping that it would mean a respite from terror. The peasantry, however, would have little influence on decisions at the national level.

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3. Among the members of organized political groups, some are opposed to Communism primarily on political or ideological grounds, others because a Communist takeover would mean personal loss of position and income, and perhaps imprisonment or death. Both types are firmly committed to an anti-Communist position. Both types would probably believe, in the assumed situation, that negotiations or any move toward negotiations would weaken resistance to Communism and open new avenues for Communist penetration and subversion of the Saigon government. Many of them also have great respect for the tactics of Communist negotiators, and would almost certainly suspect that US eagerness to disengage might lead to excessive concessions.

4. The military leaders who now control the South Vietnamese government would be in the forefront of those opposing negotiations. They believe that the tide of battle is turning in their favor, and any indication of willingness on Hanoi's part to negotiate would reinforce this belief. Almost all of them feel that the military advantage gained from the increasing US commitment should be pressed toward a total defeat of the Viet Cong; they would view any US move toward negotiations prior to a clear-cut VC defeat as a foolish compromise or even as a "sellout." They would also be concerned that a move toward talks might divide

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the military leadership, gravely damage ARVN morale, and encourage disruptive civilian elements, thereby jeopardizing the military's hold on power. In general, the military leaders fear Communist gains at the negotiating table and would prefer to see the end of major hostilities come about by a petering out of the VC effort rather than through formal negotiations.

5. We see little chance of any significant change in this view within the military even if the present leaders were replaced by another military or military-dominated regime. And, given the improved military situation, we believe that the likelihood of a "neutralist" regime coming to power has become very small. Indeed, neutralist sentiment is unlikely to become significant unless the war should drag on and on and the US commitment begin to appear of dubious value or uncertain constancy.

6. Among other influential groups, the Catholics -- particularly northern refugees -- would be most actively opposed to any negotiated settlement with the Communists. The majority of northerners now in South Vietnam are there because they fled Communist control in 1954. Many would feel personally endangered by the prospect of any compromise with the Communists, and their actions in opposition might be those of desperation. Catholic



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elements exercise substantial influence within the military and could be expected to encourage a hard stand by the military.

7. In contrast to the clear-cut Catholic stance, the attitude of Buddhists toward the prospect of negotiations would probably be somewhat contradictory and would reflect opportunistic maneuvering by the contending Buddhist leaders. Thich Tam Chau, leader of the Buddhists in the southern provinces, strongly opposes negotiations and would perhaps adopt as hard a line as the Catholics toward them. Thich Tri Quang, militant Buddhist leader in Hue, has said that negotiations under present circumstances would be a political trap which would only benefit the Communists. Tri Quang, however, has stressed the need for peace, and if he thought the tide was inexorably set for negotiations and that he could upstage his Buddhist rivals, he might modify his present attitude. In short, the various Buddhist leaders would take the course that appeared to offer them the best chance to improve their political position. If it suited this purpose, none of these leaders would hesitate to accuse the government or the US of betraying the South Vietnamese people.

8. The attitude of the students would probably reflect a vague but vocal desire for peace, coupled with an acute sense of

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nationalism. Most of the student leaders are vociferously against the government and, given their penchant for demonstrations, would find new opportunities for expressing themselves on the question of negotiations. They would be subject to exploitation by Communist and other groups, particularly by Buddhist elements which opposed the government.

9. The only significant legal political parties in South Vietnam -- the Nationalist Party of Greater Vietnam ("Dai Viet") and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNVND) -- are badly splintered, but would probably oppose any compromise with the Communists. The opportunistic leaders of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, the territorially-based religious sects, are generally opposed to the Communists, but would probably pose no special problems should the government enter into negotiations.

## II. REACTIONS TO NEGOTIATIONS

10. Despite its deep apprehensions, the Saigon government would probably hesitate to reject outright the principle of negotiations and thereby alienate world opinion and, more importantly, aggravate GVN-US relations. Instead, it would be more likely to adopt tactics designed to cloud the issue and to delay the actual holding of talks with the Communists.

11. In resisting US pressures to negotiate, the South Vietnamese leaders would be aware of their ultimate dependence upon the US. They appreciate that without continuing substantial US support, South Vietnam would fall to the Communists. At the same time, however, they feel that they have considerable leverage on the US. The totality of the US commitment in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia in general appears to them to make it very unlikely that the US would actually cut off its support to force compliance. The South Vietnamese leaders also probably calculate that the US dreads the possibility of further governmental instability in South Vietnam and would be most reluctant to encourage political elements seeking to oust the present regime.

12. As long as South Vietnam continued to make substantial military progress against the VC, there would be little disposition among the military leaders to negotiate and thereby scotch their hopes for a total victory. On the other hand, should the VC gain the military edge, the GVN would almost certainly refuse to negotiate since they would consider themselves at a distinct disadvantage. But if the military situation stabilized with South Vietnam holding a definite, though not decisive, advantage, there might be some willingness to enter into talks with the Communists. In this situation, the GVN might consider talks as an opportunity to force the Communists to acknowledge "defeat" while at the same time gaining increased commitments from the US.

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13. Ultimately, however, South Vietnamese cooperation with the US concerning negotiations would depend heavily on the nature of the US position as the prospect of negotiations was explored, and the degree to which the US consulted the GVN in advance. If the US adopted a tough line toward the Communists, it would not be difficult to persuade the South Vietnamese to go along. Moreover, if the South Vietnamese leaders were convinced that the US was committed to the long term protection of South Vietnam and willing to give pre-commitments of continued aid and the like, the task of bringing them along would be easier. In short, their cooperation would depend upon the extent to which they believed that the US position threatened their security and upon the combination of pressures and inducements which the US might employ.

14. If the South Vietnamese leaders felt forced into negotiations under conditions where they believed the US position tended toward compromise and concessions, they would resist vigorously. We believe they would take a demanding and unyielding position on almost every issue. They would oppose anything that appeared to offer any concession to the Communists, and would present demands of their own which would in effect, call for VC capitulation. Under these conditions, the GVN would, in our opinion, probably be pleased if the talks floundered and might deliberately set out to wreck them.

### III. THE SPECIFIC ISSUES

15. The most difficult issues preceding actual negotiations are likely to be the questions of a cease-fire and of the proper role of the Communist National Liberation Front (NLF) in the negotiations. Saigon would probably oppose an immediate and formal cease-fire, although it would probably accept a tacit scaling down of hostilities. It would not only fear Communist gains by "salami" tactics during a formal cease-fire, but would fear a substantial drop in ARVN morale. Saigon would anticipate substantial Communist sabotage and terrorism and would probably be concerned that the US would honor the cease-fire as long as the VC limited itself to small-scale activity. Saigon would not want to see either its own hands or those of the US tied in countering such VC action. As to the role of the NLF, the GVN would be strongly opposed to seating it as an independent delegation, and would agree to such an arrangement, if at all, only under very heavy US pressure. It might, however, be more willing to accept some face-saving formula in which the NLF participated in negotiations but not, in theory at least, as a full member.

16. Once negotiations actually began, the GVN would in general oppose any "concessions" to what it would be inclined

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to consider a defeated Communist cause. Four specific issues would probably cause the most friction: (a) the US military presence; (b) DRV aid and support of the insurrection and the PAVN presence in South Vietnam; (c) the policing of a cease-fire and settlement; and (d) the NLF role in a post-settlement government.\*

17. Saigon would react very negatively if pressed to accept a hurried or fairly complete withdrawal of US forces, although it might agree in principle to an eventual US withdrawal with no set time limit. The GVN would demand that the DRV cease its aid and support of the VC and withdraw all PAVN units from South Vietnam. Moreover, in any arrangement for policing a cease-fire or settlement, Saigon would not be satisfied with vague diplomatic expedients but would seek airtight control of Communist infiltration into South Vietnam. To this end, it would strongly oppose any policing force in which leftist neutralists participated -- let alone a Communist member, as on the ICC.

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\* The question of reunification would doubtless arise during negotiations, but little progress would be likely on this issue. The GVN might agree in principle to a unified Vietnam, but would bitterly oppose any actual steps toward this end.

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18. On the role of the NLF in a post-settlement government, South Vietnam's leaders would probably refuse to discuss Communist participation in elections or in a coalition, viewing both possibilities as a betrayal of South Vietnam's basic interests. Should this issue become a serious negotiating point, a military regime might back out of the talks, refuse to accept any agreement, and vow to continue to struggle against the Communists on its own if necessary.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman